[Historical and Medieval Georgia]

THE PEOPLE AND THE POWER

647 clear that an *eristavi* was the ruler and master of the land and
635 the inhabitants of his *saeristao*; to him were subject not only the peasants but also the *aznaurni* and even the churches—the latter, however, only in so far as their relationship with the civil government was concerned.

[292] The *eristavi* wore a particular dress which was exactly like that worn by Justinian, the Byzantine Emperor; by way of distinction he also wore "a ring and a belt"; besides "he had a banner, a horse (of particular breed) and a spear".

The *eristavt-eristavi* had authority over all *didebulni* and *aznaurni* domiciled in his *saeristavt-eristao*. Thus there was this difference between the *eristavt-eristavi* and the *eristavi*, that *didebulni*, "the great", were subject to the former and not to the latter; after the King, the *didebulni* obeyed the *eristavt-eristavi*.

In military matters, and especially during war, the *eristavt-eristavi* held supreme authority; every *didebuli* and *aznauri* and all the other inhabitants of his province had to follow his banner. *Mtavarni* and *eristavt-eristavni* wielded great power and influence; materially also they were very wealthy. Some of them were so powerful that they vied with the King and often openly opposed themselves to the royal power. At the royal receptions an *eristavt-eristavi* had this privilege, that his personal Grand Treasurer stood behind his seat with a shield and sword.

[692] One of the functions of an *eristavt-eristavi* was the supervision of justice at the peasants' court of law; the actual dispensation of justice was entrusted to his *saeristavt-eristao mamasakhlisi*. Ecclesiastical peasants, however, were excluded from his jurisdiction.

● [651] For the benefit of an *eristavi* a special tax called *saeristavoi*
[465] *gamosavali* ("the eristavi's due") was collected annually. In addition to these usual and permanent dues he also received a tribute which was collected periodically. For the supervision of the peasants' court of justice he received a fixed portion of the fines imposed by the courts, which was called *kerdzi saeristavoi* ("the eristavi's portion"). When these concerned thefts this eristavi's portion appears to have amounted to one-seventh.

An *eristavt-eristavi* had a great many subordinate officials, including *temis-eristavni* (eristavni of districts); his own *mdsignobart-ukhutsesi* ("grand secretary") and *molaret-ukhutsesi* ("grand treasurer") and numerous *msakhurni*. He also had

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641 charge of all the King's Falconers and dogs and was over all the keepers of the royal woods.

The *Ezos-Modzghvari*, or Master of the Courtyard who had under his inspection all the workshops of the palace.

The *Mzareult-Ukhutsesi*, or Chief of the Cooks, who was over all the table-servants, the kitcheners, the bakers, water-carriers, musicians and dancers. He was later called by the Persian title of *Chunchirakhi*.

The *Momgberalt-Ukhutsesi*, or Chief of the Singers, and the *Juaris-Mtvirtveli* or Cross-Bearer who was the King's messenger to the Catholicos and the Bishops; he also made public pronouncement of all penalties inflicted by royal command.

651 The royal revenues were derived from various sources. First, there were the feudal dues from the estates of the royal house which were paid in large part in kind, but also partly in money.

[436] Secondly, the Kings of Georgia and the earlier rulers of
652 Iberia coined money for circulation in the realm. Gold and silver was never found in any but negligible quantities within the country, and therefore the rarer metals used for coining and for the manufacture of objects of luxury came at all times from abroad. Large quantities of foreign coins were always in circulation in the country. Money was, however, minted in Georgia with intervals from the second century A.D. down even to the times of the paltry sovereignties of Mingrelia and Imereti, who according to Chardin, had their own mints.[1]

651 Again, the Kings of Georgia and the later rulers of the
439 divided Kingdom imposed customs dues on goods entering the country and on goods in transit. In Chardin's time there were customs levied at Iskaur (Dioscurias-Sukhum), in Abkhazeti and Fasso (Poti) in Mingrelia, and the insolence which he met from the Pasha of Akhaltzikhé's customs officers at Gonia was in the true tradition of the *douane*. There were also provincial and municipal customs where levies were made not only by the King, but by other authorities such as the Catholicos of Mtzkheta or the chieftains of Osseti. Boat traffic on the Mtkvari and ferries over this and other rivers were subject to levy, and also caravans entering and leaving Tiflis and Gori.

651 Further, the Kings levied a miscellaneous collection of taxes of all kinds and descriptions. The *Dastulamali* gives a list of taxes paid to the later Kings of Kartli, together with the shares of these taxes to which certain court officials were

[1] Chardin (1686 ed.), pp. 91 and 206.

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COURT AND ADMINISTRATION

entitled. The King controlled the farming of the famous mineral springs at Tiflis and he farmed the monopoly of the sale of brandy. He and his *Mdivan-begi* or Chief Judge had a share of all judicial fines imposed and of damages gained by plaintiff parties. The King drew rents from the irrigation canals and revenue from taxes on wine, on flocks and on the tents of nomads; the shopkeepers of Tiflis bore the cost of the lighting of the royal palace; one district was under the obligation to supply beaters for the King's hunt; another to cart snow for the ice storage of his larders. In a third district we learn that the King having originally distributed geese to the inhabitants, there was an annual tax of two goslings on every goose. Further examples of ingenious but unscientific extraction were taxes on married men, ploughs, furnaces, beasts of burden and falcons and their nests.

Another—and a principal—source of revenue, particularly in times of emergency, were the special poll-taxes which were levied sometimes on the individual or on families, at other times on houses, cattle, horses, trees or agricultural produce. Such taxes were generally levied in the emergency of war, but from the sixteenth century onwards they were more often extracted to meet the demands of the commanders of invading armies of Persians and Turks. We have already referred to the taxes imposed during the days of the Mongol hegemony and to the special levies in human kind made by the Shah and the Sultan, to meet which the Georgian Kings on occasion made levies with the object of purchasing substitute slaves from the mountaineers.

The invaders from time to time also made direct capital impositions. In 1724, the Turks imposed a poll-tax on the whole male population and levied also on cattle, horses and agricultural produce; and in 1736 the Persians imposed such an onerous tax on cattle and trees that five years later the army of Nadir Shah was beset by famine. The Persian exactions continued until in 1747, when King Taymuraz II effected a kind of general strike by moving all the peasantry of the open country into the hills and strong places. As a result, Nadir reduced his imposition from 200,000 to 25,000 *tumans*.

Lastly, throughout the Middle Ages the Kings not infrequently levied special poll-taxes enduring over a period of years, the proceeds of which were spent in the repair of churches and royal castles, and of towns which had been devastated during foreign invasions.

It was the practice of the Georgian kings and of the earlier

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THE SLAVE TRADE

any more slaves, and by another, two noble brothers promise the Catholicos Domenti II to repurchase slaves which they had sold at Akhaltzikhé, and also not to divide up families.[1]

Furthermore the practice existed, on the occasion of levies of slaves by Turkish and Persian armies, of buying substitutes from among the mountaineers—Ossetians and Cherkess—in order to avoid surrendering Georgians into slavery. King Wakhtang VI of Kartli is commended for only sending slaves to the Shah when they were actually demanded, and then for buying substitutes instead of sending Georgians.[2] Wakhushti states that, in the reign of King Simon I of Kartli, a special tax of one *marchil* (about two shillings) was levied on each peasant's house in order "to buy Ossetians, Caucasians and Cherkess, which he sent to the Qaen".[3]

Again there was a special obligation laid on the Tatar nomads of Borchalo to provide for the slaves on their way to the Persian border.

Ground down by an inequitable and tyrannous fiscal system, oppressed by onerous feudal obligations, harassed by the perpetual civil warrings of their masters, harried by continual Mussulman incursions, duped and mulcted by an ignorant and unworthy priesthood, and living under the constant threat of deportation and the break-up of their families, the lot of the Georgian peasants was a miserable one. Nature alone was their friend: their physical needs in a mild and equable climate were insignificant; a rich soil, a warm sun and an adequacy of water could rapidly make good to them their losses and their deprivations; a primitive and all-surrounding forest and mountains difficult of access, which they could know better than their masters and their enemies, offered them a near and friendly refuge in their dangers and their troubles. The Georgian peasantry certainly had more to suffer than any other peasantry during the three centuries following the Division of the Kingdom—whatever may have been their relative situation during earlier periods of history. For neither the Armenians nor the peasantry of the Balkan lands nor of Persia and Turkey—great as were their tribulations—had to endure the existence of a perpetual state of war, and the continuous and virulent driving of the slave-traffic. It is the character of the Georgians—the "æsthetic irresponsibility" of them—that has carried them through their miseries; and it is, perhaps, these miseries,

[1] Brosset, *Introduction*, p. lxxiii.
[2] *Idem.*, *Introduction*, p. clxi.
[3] Brosset, *H. de la G.*, I, 105.

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of the army. The monas were the slaves without property who performed unskilled labour, working in the fields, vineyards and forests of their lords, repairing the roads, and constructing buildings. Further, they were under obligation to supply guides and escorts to their lords on a journey and in time of war to follow his banner. In return they occupied a plot of land, proper to themselves—a proportion of the produce of which they were compelled to pay to their masters,—and they could rely on the protection of the seignorial castle in the event of invasion. The lords administered local justice and had power of life and death; further, they were at liberty to sell or exchange their serfs, while the latter, if the land were sold, passed with it.

After the end of the fifteenth century, when intercourse with Persia and Turkey became easy, this seignorial privilege, which had its parallel in every country in Europe, was abased by the wholesale exportation of serfs, male and female, to the slave-markets of Tabriz, Akhaltsikh and Trebizond. This iniquitous commerce was particularly brisk in Mingrelia and Guria, and Chardin, in the latter half of the seventeenth century, estimated that the peasantry were sold into Turkey at the rate of 12,000 a year. "La Mingrélie," he states, "est aujourd'hui fort peu peuplée . . . la cause de cette diminution vient de ses guerres avec ses voisins, et de la quantité de gens de tout sexe que les gentilshommes ont vendue ces dernières années." He goes on to tell of an impecunious but enterprising nobleman who had recently sold twelve priests and his own wife to a Turkish sea-captain at Trebizond.

It must be explained, however, that this sale of Christian souls to the Infidels was strongly condemned by the heads of the Georgian Church, who imposed severe penalties when it was within their power, and remitted the sins of the penitent who should redeem a Christian from slavery in Turkey.

In addition to the feudal dues from the Royal estates, the Kings levied a number of general taxes, and of special dues on certain neighbourhoods, some of which must have seriously interfered with the prosperity of their subjects. Such were taxes on wine, flocks, beasts of burden, ploughs, married men, furnaces and falcons. But in addition to the impositions of their own kings and feudal lords, the long-suffering Georgian peasantry were subject to the indiscriminate levies of invading armies of Mongols, Persians and Turks. In 1724 the Turks imposed a poll-tax on the whole male population and levied on cattle, horses and agricultural products; in 1736 the Per-

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sians imposed such an onerous tax on cattle and trees that, five years later, the army of Nadir Shah was beset by famine. But the Persian exactions continued, until in 1747 the King of Karthalinia effected a kind of general strike by withdrawing all the working population into the hills and strong places. Lastly, in consequence of the wars, the people were frequently subjected to a special tax, enduring over a period of years, the proceeds of which were spent in the repair of churches and castles and in the redemption of slaves.

In two respects the Church in Georgia bears an important relation to the political history of the country. Firstly, Christianity, both in Zoroastrian and Mussulman days, represented the influence of Byzantium and the West as opposed to that of Persia and the East. And the prosperity and power of the Church fluctuated according to the respective strength of Christendom and Islam. Secondly, Georgia did not experience the struggle between Church and State which was taking place in other parts of Christendom. This fact must be attributed directly to the menace of Islam. The influence of the Church with the peasantry was too valuable to the King, and the armed protection of the King was too important to the Church, to allow of either of them attempting to weaken or dispense with the other. The revival of the Georgian monarchy saw the reappearance of a Catholicos at Mtzkhet, and the rich endowment of churches and monasteries. While Henry II in England was wrangling with Thomas à Becket, the Georgian Kings were showering favours and privileges on their clergy. The Catholicos and his bishops held wide lands and owned great numbers of slaves; many nobles were the vassals of Mtzkhet. Besides this, the clergy were free from all taxation, being liable only to contribute in a national emergency.

During the great days of the Bagratid monarchy the Church flourished and grew rich, under the protection of and in alliance with the Crown. But rarely do we note traces of that friction between the two dominant bodies in the State which was disturbing the politics of Western Christendom. The Catholicos, indeed, was recognised virtually as the equal of the King, and his feudal levies were commanded by an independent General, nominated by himself.

The two powers seem to have been interdependent; the King nominated a new Catholicos; the Catholicos presided over the Assembly of lords and bishops at the coronation of a new King. Together the King and the Church monopolised the greater part of the wealth of the country. Hundreds of